August 2014 Newsletter

TOMATOES!

You may soon be harvesting or preparing to harvest tomatoes you planted earlier this season. They are coming in a bit late due to the delay caused by the polar vortex, but they are on their way!

Our Ask the Experts consultants are answering a lot of tomato questions, so we know it's a hot topic. Good thing HGIC has a lot of good tomato info!

Tomato Tip: Instead of flimsy tomato cages from a hardware store which are prone to blowing over, consider building cages with concrete reinforcing wire. Watch this video for more information.

Tomato Tip: Prune suckers from your tomato plant to ensure that they do not hog the plant's energy that is best used elsewhere. Watch this video for more information.

For more seasonal quick tips for vegetables, flowers, wildlife, and more, check out our Quick Tips section of the website.

Featured Plant for August: Pentas, Egyptian star flower

Pentas lanceolata

Text and Photo by Debbie Ricigliano

Pentas thrives even during the hottest days of summer and deserves more space in summer annual gardens or containers. Blooming in shades of pink, red, violet and white, the starry five-petaled flowers grow in clusters atop dark green lance-shaped leaves. In drifts of similar colors or contrasting patterns, they attract butterflies and hummingbirds. For best flowering, plant in full sun in well-drained soil. Most varieties grow to 1-2’ tall and wide, with few pest or disease problems. Expect blooms all summer long until frost, especially if you deadhead the spent flowers, although this is not necessary. Pentas can be started from seed indoors about 8 weeks before the last spring frost date; then planted outdoors after the last killing frost.

More Featured Plants

Watch out for these pests on your trees this season

Fall Webworm

Locust Leafminer
Fall webworm (*Hyphantria cunea*) caterpillars may feed on more than 100 species of deciduous forest and shade trees.

The caterpillars produce a web of fine silk over terminal branches. They only feed inside the web, which they enlarge as they grow. Look on the south side of tree crowns for the first sign of webbing. The webs may become messy, but the caterpillars rarely consume enough terminal growth to affect the tree. The first generation begins in May and is usually small. The second-generation caterpillars are present from August through October. The dry webs hang on terminals into the winter.

Management: Prune out webbed terminals as they are detected. Pole pruners are useful for removing tents in trees. B.t. (*Bacillus thuringiensis*, var. Kurstaki), horticultural oil, or insecticidal soap is recommended to control young larvae in large infestations and protect beneficials. There are 75 species of predators and parasites that normally keep this pest below damaging levels. Whatever you do, don’t try to burn them out!

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The locust leafminer (*Odontota dorsalis*) is a serious pest of black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*). Heavily infested trees appear scorched or burned. These trees will drop their leaves and will refoliate during the summer. Outbreaks of the locust leafminer occur practically every year, and thousands of black locusts turn brown and are defoliated. Trees that are defoliated seldom die. However, if the damage occurs during a year of drought, or other poor growing conditions, the trees may be killed. If the trees grow two sets of leaves in one growing season, the combined feeding of larvae and adults may destroy both sets. If this double defoliation occurs several years in a row, the tree may die.

Management: To help trees better withstand the effects of defoliation, provide adequate water during the summer. Healthy, vigorous trees are better able to withstand the effects of defoliation that are stressed trees.

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**Lawn care best management practices**

- **Late summer through early fall is the best time to sow grass seed** and to perform lawn renovation. HG 102 Lawn Establishment, Renovation, and Overseeding
- **Perform a soil test** every three years. HG 110 Soil Testing - Selecting and Using a Soil Testing Laboratory
- **Plant turf type tall fescue**, which is the recommended grass species for Maryland. Seed mixtures that include annual ryegrass or perennial ryegrass should be
My tomato plants have lots of blossoms but aren't fruiting. What's going on?

There are lots of environmental and cultural factors that could result in flowers but no fruit. Excessive heat kills the pollen of tomato flowers. Excessive rain can hamper the pollination process. Excessive nitrogen fertilizer can result in excessive foliage and not much fruit. Also, the extended cool spring weather we experienced set everything back at least two weeks this year, so it may be that patience is the best advice for now. Incidentally, you're in good company. This is a common complaint this year.

Help! Our tomato plants are having issues. Some leaves were turning brown and crinkly but now it has spread and the leaves have these spot.

From your photo the tomato foliage looks like it was subject to septoria leaf spot. This can be a common leaf spot disease of tomatoes and is favored by wet weather. See our website for more information on management.

More info and on growing tomatoes

Featured Video: Composting for Your Garden
We join Master Gardener Bettye Ames as she walks us through the steps on how to make your own nutritious compost. She explains the benefits of hot composting and how to turn everyday food and garden waste into "black gold."

Watch the video

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